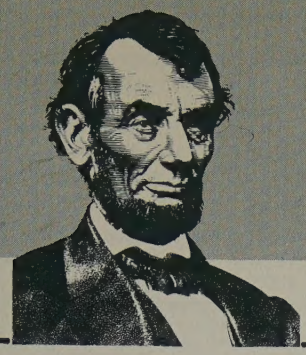

Lincoln Lore

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HORSE SENSE AND HORSEPLAY AT THE NATIONAL REPUBLICAN CONVENTION CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, MAY 16-18, 1860

Historians are grateful to Murat Halstead for his accurate reporting of the National Political Conventions of 1860. As a correspondent of the Cincinnati *Commercial* he made the "circuit of conventions" and in his reports endeavored to "pursue the path of candor", which was in harmony with his own personal feeling and was the policy of his newspaper. However, despite his desire to write without prejudice against or partiality for any political party, one cannot but help note the feeling of disappointment that this Republican of independent convictions experienced over William H. Seward's defeat at Chicago.

Halstead used the day-by-day method of reporting. He was a close observer, and it was his habit to write as he observed. His letters and dispatches were such lively, readable accounts of the proceedings of the conventions that they were at once published in book form for convenient reference during the presidential campaign. As an astute political observer Halstead could sense the importance of political trends and his reports included much official and tabulated information.

Halstead's 233 page book bears the following title: Caucuses of 1860./A History/Of The/Current Presidential Campaign:/Being A/Complete Record Of The Business Of All/ The Conventions;/With Sketches Of Distinguished Men In Attendance Upon Them,/And Descriptions Of The Most Characteristic/Scenes And Memorable Events/Compiled from the Correspondence of the Cincinnati Commercial, written/"On the Circuit of the Convention," and the Official Reports/By M. Halstead/An Eye-witness Of Them All/Columbus:/Follett, Foster and Company,/1860.

The following excerpts from Halstead's reports of the Chicago convention indicate that he was an astute political observer, but that, at the same time, he saw some humor in the horseplay that inevitably results when politicians gather for the purpose of selecting a president of the United States:

ardent beverages consumed on the train . . .

. . . it becomes necessary to say that the quantity of whiskey and other ardent beverages consumed on the train in which I reached the city, was much greater than on any train that within my knowledge entered Charleston during convention times.

some New Yorkers . . .

. . . our western reserve was thrown into prayers and perspiration last night by some New Yorkers, who were singing songs not found in hymn-books.

the principal lions . . .

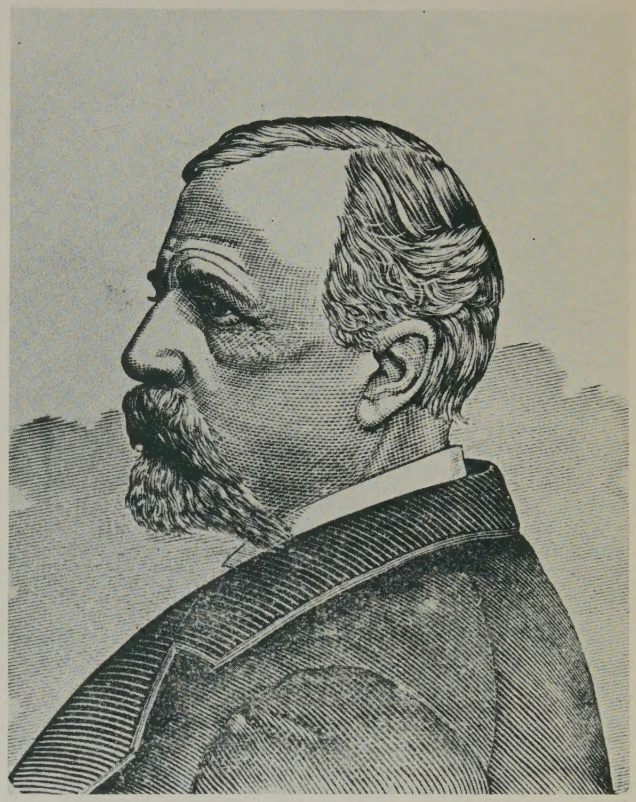
The principal lions in this (Tremont) house are Horace Greeley and Frank P. Blair, Sen.

the political news . . .

The political news is the utter failure of the Ohio delegation to come to any agreement, and the loss of influence by that state.

rumors . . .

There are a thousand rumors afloat, and things of incalculable moment are communicated to you confidentially, at intervals of five minutes.



twaddle . . .

The current of the universal twaddle this morning is that "Old Abe" will be the nominee.

dunces . . .

The badges of different candidates are making their appearance, and a good many of the dunces of the occasion go about duly labeled.

badges of silk . . .

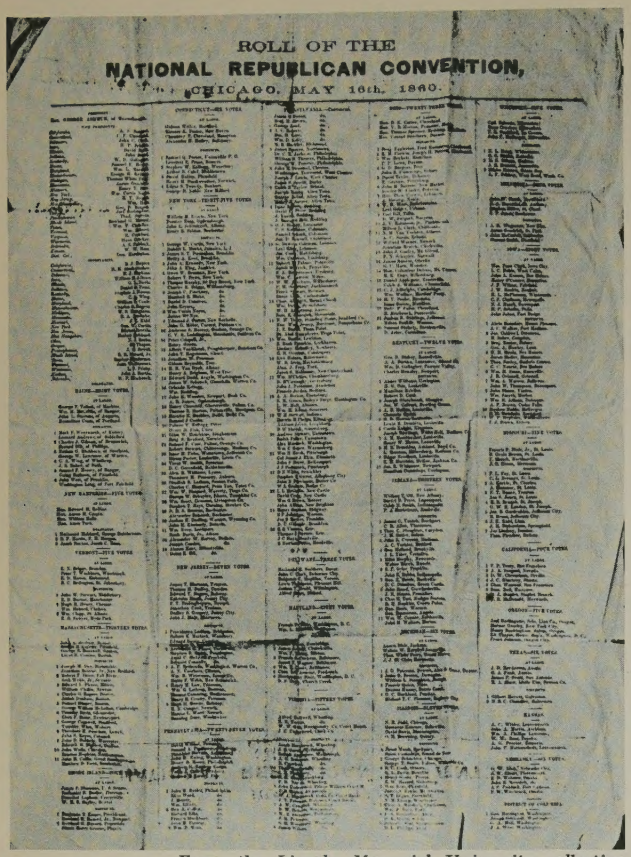
The Seward men have badges of silk with his likeness and name, and some wag pinned one of them to Horace Greeley's back yesterday, and he created even an unusual sensation as he hitched about with the Seward mark upon him.

the philosophic Horace . . .

When the roll was called . . . Greeley had the greatest ovation, and though there is an impression to the contrary, those who know him well, know that nobody is more fond of the breath of popular favor than the philosophic Horace.

presiding officer . . .

The Hon. George Ashmun, the presiding officer, was escorted to his chair by Preston King and Carl Schurz,


ROLL OF THE
NATIONAL REPUBLICAN CONVENTION,
CHICAGO, MAY 16th, 1860.

From the Lincoln Memorial University collection

the one short and round as a barrel and fat as butter, the other tall and slender.

had not heard a harsh word . . .

He (Ashmun) had not heard a harsh word or unkind expression pass between delegates. Now, the gentleman must have kept very close, or his hearing is deplorably impaired.

the question . . .

The question on which everything turns is whether Seward can be nominated. His individuality is the pivot here, just as that of Douglas was at Charleston.

the rush for places was tremendous . . .

This afternoon the rush for places was tremendous. There was a great deal of fun, and some curious performances, in filling the galleries (where only gentlemen accompanied by ladies are admitted). Ladies to accompany gentlemen were in demand—school-girls were found on the street, and given a quarter each to see a gentleman safe in. Other girls, those of undoubted character (no doubt on the subject whatever), were sought after as escorts.

the "irrepressibles" and the "conservatives" . . .

The Republicans have all divided into two classes, the "irrepressibles" and the "conservatives."

favorite word . . .

The favorite word in the convention is "solemn." Everything is solemn. In Charleston the favorite word was "crisis." Here there is something every ten minutes found to be solemn. In Charleston there was a crisis nearly as often. I observed as many as twenty-three in one day.

new ticket . . .

A new ticket is talked of here to-night . . . It is "Lincoln and Hickman." This is now the ticket as against Seward and Cash. Clay.

Ohio delegation . . .

The Ohio delegation continues so divided as to be without influence. If united it would have a formidable influence, and might throw the casting votes between candidates, holding the balance of power between the East and the West.

the crowd . . .

All adjectives might be fairly exhausted in describing the crowd (second day). It is mighty and overwhelming; it can only be numbered by tens of thousands.

the Sewardites . . .

. . . the Sewardites are true as steel to their champion, and they will cling to "Old Irrepressible." as they call him, until the last gun is fired and the big bell rings.

credentials . . .

The convention was proceeding into battle on the subject (Rules), when Cartter of Ohio suggested that they were about to undertake the serious business without the report of the Committee on Credentials. War then took place about credentials.

a simple majority . . .

A simple majority (Committee on Rules) should nominate.

tariff plank . . .

Pennsylvania went into spasms of joy over the "tariff plank."

(platform) adopted . . .

So it (platform) was adopted. The vote was taken about six o'clock, and upon the announcement being made a scene ensued of the most astounding character. The roar that went up from that mass of ten thousand human beings under one roof was indescribable. Such a spectable as was presented for some minutes has never before been witnessed at a Convention. A herd of buffaloes or lions could not have made a more tremendous roaring.

they urged an immediate ballot . . .

So confident were the Seward men, when the platform was adopted, of their ability to nominate their great leader, that they urged an immediate ballot, and would have had it if the clerks had not reported that they were unprovided with tally-sheets.

ill-tutored youths . . .

The New Yorkers here are of a class unknown to western Republican politicians. They can drink as much whiskey, swear as loud and long, sing as bad songs, and "get up and howl" as ferociously as any crowd of Democrats you ever heard, or heard of. They are opposed, as they say, "to being too d—virtuous." They slap each other on the back with the emphasis of delight when they meet, and rip out "How are you?" with a "How are you hoss?" style, that would do honor to Old Kaintuck on a bust. At night those of them who are not engaged at caucusing, are doing that which ill-tutored youths call "raising h--l generally."

after the adjournment on Thursday . . .

After adjournment on Thursday (second day), there were few men in Chicago who believed it possible to prevent the nomination of Seward.

hundreds . . . never closed their eyes that night

But there was much done after midnight and before the convention assembled on Friday morning. There were hundreds of Pennsylvanias, Indianians and Illinoisans, who never closed their eyes that night.

Wade movement . . .

The Wade movement died before this time. It had a brilliant and formidable appearance for a while. It does not appear by the record that "Old Ben. Wade" ever stood a chance for the place now occupied by "Old Abe Lincoln." If his friends in Ohio, could have brought the friends of Mr. Chase to agree, . . . , Wade might have been the nominee, and instead of hearing so much of some of the exploits of Mr. Lincoln in railsplitting, when a farmer boy, we should have information concerning the labors of Ben Wade on the Erie Canal, where he handled a spade.

availability . . .

The cry of a want of availability which was from the start raised against Seward, now took a more definite form than heretofore.

tremendous applause (Seward and Lincoln)

The only names that "produced tremendous applause" were those of Seward and Lincoln. The shouting (Seward men) was absolutely frantic, shrill and wild. No Comanches, no panthers ever struck a higher note or gave screams with more infernal intensity.

Mr. Delano of Ohio . . .

Now the Lincoln men had to try it again, and as Mr. Delano of Ohio, on behalf "of a portion of the delegation of that State," seconded the nomination of Lincoln, the uproar was beyond description. Imagine all the hogs ever slaughtered in Cincinnati giving their death squeals together, a score of big steam whistles going (steam at 160 lbs. per inch), and you conceive something of the same nature.

the presumption entertained . . .

It now dawned upon the multitude, that the presumption entertained the night before, that the Seward men would have everything their own way, was a mistake.

it was whispered about . . .

It was whispered about—"Lincoln's the coming man—will be nominated this (third) ballot."

every eye was on Cartter . . .

Every eye was on Cartter (Lincoln needed one and one-half votes to win the nomination), and everybody who understood the matter at all, knew what he was about to do . . . He has . . . an impediment in his speech, which amounts to a stutter; and his selection as chairman of the Ohio delegation was, considering its condition, altogether appropriate. He said, "I rise (eh), Mr. Chairman (eh), to announce the change of four votes of Ohio from Mr. Chase to Mr. Lincoln."

a noise in the Wigwam like the rush of a great wind . . .

There was a moment's silence. The nerves of the thousands, which through the hours of suspense had been subjected to terrible tension, relaxed, and as deep breaths of relief were taken, there was a noise in the Wigwam like the rush of a great wind, in the van of a storm—and in another breath, the storm was there.

Fire the Salute! . . .

A man who had been on the roof, and was engaged in communicating the results of the balloting to the mighty masses of outsiders, now demanded by gestures at the sky-light over the stage, to know what had happened. One of the Secretaries, with a tally sheet in his hands, shouted "Fire the Salute! Abe Lincoln is nominated."

a new impulse to the enthusiasm . . .

As the cheering inside the Wigwam subsided, we could hear . . . outside, where the news of the nomination had just been announced. And the roar, like the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep that was heard, gave a new impulse to the enthusiasm inside. Then the thunder of the salute rose above the din, and the shouting was repeated with such tremendous fury that some discharges of the cannon were absolutely not heard by those on the stage. Puffs of smoke, drifting by the open doors, and the smell of gunpower, told what was going on.

a cheap way for men to distinguish themselves . . .

The moment that half a dozen men who were on their chairs making motions at the president could be heard, they changed the votes of their states to Mr. Lincoln. This was a mere formality, and was a cheap way for men to distinguish themselves.

a photograph of Abe Lincoln . . .

While these votes were being given, the applause continued, and a photograph of Abe Lincoln which had hung in one of the side rooms was brought in, and held up before the surging and screaming masses.

anti-climax . . .

There was a little clap-trap and something of anti-climax in shouting "Lincoln and victory," and talking of "defying the whole slave power and the whole vassalage of hell."

with some beating of the heart,
with some quivering in the veins . . .

M. (Austin) Blair of Michigan made the speech of the hour. He said, "Michigan, from first to last, has cast her vote for the great statesman of New York. She has nothing to take back. She has not sent me forward to worship the rising sun, but she has put me forward to say that, at your behests today, she lays down her first, best loved candidate to take up yours, with some beating of the heart, with some quivering in the veins; but she does not fear that the fame of Seward will suffer, for she knows that his fame is a portion of the history of the American Union; it will be written, and read, and beloved long after the temporary excitement of this day has passed away, and when presidents themslves are forgotten in the oblivion which comes over all temporal things. We stand by him still. We have followed him with an eye single and with unwavering faith in times past. We marshal now behind him in the grand column which shall go out to battle for Lincoln."

it was their funeral

The Seward men were terribly stricken down. They were mortified beyond all expression, and walked thoughtfully and silently away from the slaughter-house, more ashamed than embittered. They acquiesced in the nomination, but did not pretend to be pleased with it; and the tone of their conversations, as to the prospect of electing the candidate, was not hopeful. It was their funeral, and they would not make merry.

the last act in the drama . . .

During the dinner recess a caucus of the presidents of delegations was held, and New York, though requested to do so, would not name a candidate for the vice-presidency. After dinner we had the last act in the drama.

a thousand voices called Clay! Clay! . . .

The nomination of vice-president was not particularly exciting. Casius M. Clay was the only competitor of Hamlin, who made any show in the race; and the outside pressure was for him. At one time a thousand voices called "Clay! Clay!" to the Convention. If the multitude could have had their way, Mr. Clay would have been put on the ticket by acclamation.

Mr. Hamlin was a good friend of Mr. Seward . . .

But it was stated that Mr. Hamlin was a good friend of Mr. Seward. He was geographically distant from Lincoln, and once a Democrat. (second ballot: Hamlin 367, Clay 86, Hickman 13).

the fact of the convention . . .

The fact of the convention, was the defeat of Seward rather than the nomination of Lincoln. It was the triumph of a presumption of availability over pre-eminence in intellect and unrivaled fame—a success of the ruder qualities of mankind and the more homely attributes of popularity, over the arts of a consummate politician, and the splendor of accomplished statemanship.

"Old Abe" men formed processions . . .

The city was wild with delight. The "Old Abe" men formed processions, and bore rails through the streets. Torrents of liquor were poured down the hoarse throats of the multitude. A hundred guns were fired from the top of the Tremont House. The Chicago press and Tribune office was illuminated.

there were tar barrels bunring, drums beating . . .

I left the city on the night train on the Fort Wayne and Chicago road. At every station where there was a village . . . there were tar barrels burning, drums beating, boys carrying rails; and guns, great and small, banging away. The weary passengers were allowed no rest, but plagued by the thundering jar of cannon, the clamor of drums, the glare of bonfires, and the whooping of the boys, who were delighted with the idea of a candidate for the presidency, who thirty years ago split rails on the Sangamon River—classic stream now and for evermore—and whose neighbors named him "honest."

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New items available for consideration may be sent to the above addresses or to the Lincoln National Life Foundation.

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